1. "I thought once how

Theocritus had sung..."  
I thought once how Theocritus had sung  
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years,  
Who each one in a gracious hand appears  
To bear a gift for mortals, old or young:  
And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,  
I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,  
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,  
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung  
A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,  
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move  
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair;  
And a voice said in mastery, while I strove, ---  
'Guess now who holds thee?' --- 'Death,' I said. But, there,  
The silver answer rang, --- 'Not Death, but Love.'

XIII. "And wilt thou have me

fashion into speech..."

And wilt thou have me fashion into speech  
The love I bear thee, finding words enough,  
And hold the torch out, while the winds are rough,  
Between our faces, to cast light on each?---  
I drop it at thy feet. I cannot teach  
My hand to hold my spirit so far off  
From myself---me---that I should bring thee proof  
In words, of love hid in me out of reach.  
Nay, let the silence of my womanhood  
Commend my woman-love to thy belief,---  
Seeing that I stand unwon, however wooed,  
And rend the garment of my life, in brief,  
By a most dauntless, voiceless fortitude,  
Lest one touch of this heart convey its grief.

XIV. "If thou must love me, let it

be for nought..."

If thou must love me, let it be for nought  
Except for love's sake only. Do not say  
'I love her for her smile---her look---her way  
Of speaking gently,---for a trick of thought  
That falls in well with mine, and certes brought  
A sense of pleasant ease on such a day'---  
For these things in themselves, Belovèd, may  
Be changed, or change for thee,---and love, so wrought,  
May be unwrought so. Neither love me for  
Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry,---  
A creature might forget to weep, who bore  
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby!  
But love me for love's sake, that evermore  
Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity.

XXI. "Say over again, and yet

once over again..."

Say over again, and yet once over again,  
That thou dost love me. Though the word repeated  
Should seem 'a cuckoo song,' as thou dost treat it,  
Remember, never to the hill or plain,  
Valley and wood, without her cuckoo-strain  
Comes the fresh Spring in all her green completed.  
Belovèd, I, amid the darkness greeted  
By a doubtful spirit-voice, in that doubt's pain,  
Cry, 'Speak once more---thou lovest!' Who can fear  
Too many stars, though each in heaven shall roll,  
Too many flowers, though each shall crown the year?  
Say thou dost love me, love me, love me---toll  
The silver iterance!---only minding, Dear,  
To love me also in silence with thy soul.

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| XXII. "When our two souls stand up  erect and strong..." |
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| When our two souls stand up erect and strong, Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher, Until the lengthening wings break into fire At either curvèd point,---what bitter wrong Can the earth do to us, that we should not long Be here contented? Think! In mounting higher, The angels would press on us and aspire To drop some golden orb of perfect song Into our deep, dear silence. Let us stay Rather on earth, Belovèd,---where the unfit Contrarious moods of men recoil away And isolate pure spirits, and permit A place to stand and love in for a day, With darkness and the death-hour rounding it. |

XXVIII. "My letters! all dead paper,

mute and white!..."

My letters! all dead paper, mute and white!  
And yet they seem alive and quivering  
Against my tremulous hands which loose the string  
And let them drop down on my knee to-night.  
This said,---he wished to have me in his sight  
Once, as a friend: this fixed a day in spring  
To come and touch my hand . . . a simple thing,  
Yet I wept for it!---this, . . . the paper's light . . .  
Said, *Dear, I love thee;* and I sank and quailed  
As if God's future thundered on my past.  
This said, *I am thine---*and so its ink has paled  
With lying at my heart that beat too fast.  
And this . . . O Love, thy words have ill availed  
If, what this said, I dared repeat at last!

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| XXXII. "The first time that the sun  rose on thine oath..." |
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| The first time that the sun rose on thine oath To love me, I looked forward to the moon To slacken all those bonds which seemed too soon And quickly tied to make a lasting troth. Quick-loving hearts, I thought, may quickly loathe; And, looking on myself, I seemed not one For such man's love!---more like an out-of-tune Worn viol, a good singer would be wroth To spoil his song with, and which, snatched in haste, Is laid down at the first ill-sounding note. I did not wrong myself so, but I placed A wrong on *thee*. For perfect strains may float 'Neath master-hands, from instruments defaced,--- And great souls, at one stroke, may do and doat. |
| XLIII. "How do I love thee? Let me  count the ways..." |
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| How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight For the ends of Being and ideal Grace. I love thee to the level of everyday's Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light. I love thee freely, as men strive for Right; I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise. I love thee with a passion put to use In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith. I love thee with a love I seemed to lose With my lost saints, --- I love thee with the breath, Smiles, tears, of all my life! --- and, if God choose, I shall but love thee better after death. |